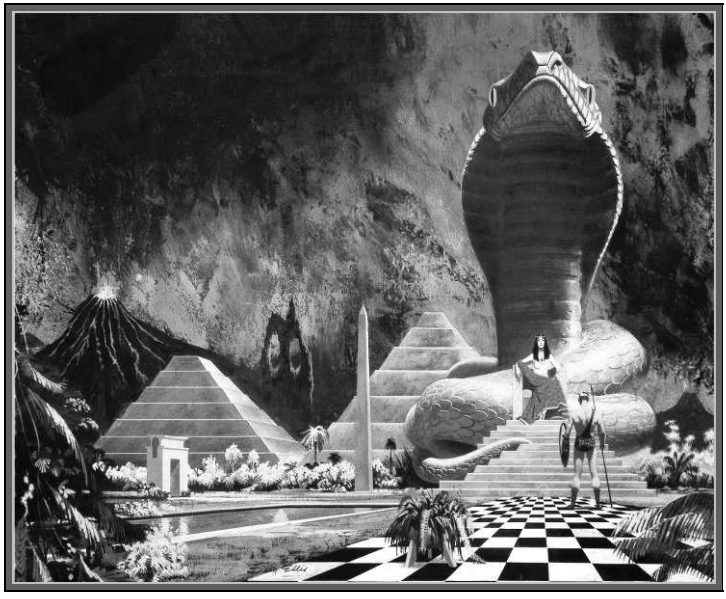
THE LOST CONTINENT



Charles John Cutcliffe

Wright Hyne

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About The Book

&

Author:

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Charles John Cutcliffe Wright Hyne (1866 –1944) was an English novelist who was also known by the pen name Weatherby Chesney. He is perhaps best remembered as the author of **The Lost Continent**: "*The Story of Atlantis*". He is also remembered for his "*Captain Kettle stories*" and "*The Lost Continent*"...

The Lost Continent, A classic "*lost race*" story, with all of the required elements: a seductive empress, a straight-arrow hero, battles, escapes, sorcery, and earth-shattering cataclysms! Eminently readable and very entertaining, without any profundity to distract a fan of Haggard, Aubrey, or Janvier-style fantasy literature.

* * *

Prefatory:
The Legatees of Deucalion

§

We were both of us not a little stiff as the result of sleeping out in the open all that night, for even in Grand Canary the dew-fall and the comparative chill of darkness are not to be trifled with. For myself on these occasions I like a bit of a run as an early refresher.

But here on this rough ground in the middle of the island there were not three yards of level to be found, and so as Coppinger proceeded to go through some sort of dumb-bell exercises with a couple of lumps of bristly lava, I followed his example. Coppinger has done a good deal of roughing it in his time, but being a doctor of medicine amongst other things—he takes out a new degree of some sort on an average every other year—he is great on health theories, and practises them like a religion.

There had been rain two days before, and as there was still a bit of stream trickling along at the bottom of the barranca, we went down there and had a wash, and brushed our teeth. Greatest luxury imaginable, a toothbrush, on this sort of expedition.

"Now," said Coppinger when we had emptied our pockets, "there's precious little grub left, and it's none the better for being carried in a local Spanish newspaper."

"Yours is mostly tobacco ashes."

"It'll get worse if we leave it. We've a lot more bad scrambling ahead of us."

That was obvious. So we sat down beside the stream there at the bottom of the barranca, and ate up all of what was left. It was a ten-mile tramp to the fonda at Santa Brigida, where we had set down our traps; and as Coppinger wanted to take a lot more photographs and measurements before we left this particular group of caves, it was likely we should be pretty sharp set before we got our next meal, and our next taste of the PATRON'S splendid old country wine. My faith! If only they knew down in the English hotels in Las Palmas what magnificent wines one could get—with diplomacy—up in some of the mountain villages, the old vintage would become a thing of the past in a week.

Now to tell the truth, the two mummies he had gathered already quite satisfied my small ambition. The goatskins in which they were sewn up were as brittle as paper, and the poor old things themselves gave out dust like a puffball whenever they were touched. But you know what Coppinger is. He thought he'd come upon traces of an old Guanche university, or sacred college, or something of that kind, like the one there is on the other side of the island, and he wouldn't be satisfied till he'd ransacked every cave in the whole face of the cliff. He'd plenty of stuff left for the flashlight thing, and twenty-eight more films in his kodak, and said we might as well get through with the job then as make a return journey all on purpose. So he took the crowbar, and I shouldered the rope, and away we went up to the ridge of the cliff, where we had got such a baking from the sun the day before.

Of course these caves were not easy to come at, or else they would have been raided years before. Coppinger, who on principle makes out he knows all about these things, says that in the old Guanche days they had ladders of goatskin rope which they could pull up when they were at home, and so keep out undesir-

able callers; and as no other plan occurs to me, perhaps he may be right. Anyway the mouths of the caves were in a more or less level row thirty feet below the ridge of the cliff, and fifty feet above the bottom; and Spanish curiosity doesn't go in much where it cannot walk.

Now laddering such caves from below would have been cumbersome, but a light knotted rope is easily carried, and though it would have been hard to climb up this, our plan was to descend on each cave mouth from above, and then slip down to the foot of the cliffs, and start again AB INITIO for the next.

Coppinger is plucky enough, and he has a good head on a height, but there is no getting over the fact that he is portly and nearer fifty than forty-five. So you can see he must have been pretty keen. Of course I went first each time, and got into the cave mouth, and did what I could to help him in; but when you have to walk down a vertical cliff face fly-fashion, with only a thin bootlace of a rope for support, it is not much real help the man below can give, except offer you his best wishes.

I wanted to save him as much as I could, and as the first three caves I climbed to were small and empty, seeming to be merely store-places, I asked him to take them for granted, and save himself the rest. But he insisted on clambering down to each one in person, and as he decided that one of my granaries was a prison, and another a pot-making factory, and another a schoolroom for young priests, he naturally said he hadn't much reliance on my judgment, and would have to go through the whole lot himself. You know what these thorough-going archaeologists are for imagination.

But as the day went on, and the sun rose higher, Coppinger began clearly to have had enough of it, though he was very game, and insisted on going on much longer than was safe. I must say I

didn't like it. You see the drop was seldom less than eighty feet from the top of the cliffs. However, at last he was forced to give it up. I suggested marching off to Santa Brigida forthwith, but he wouldn't do that. There were three more cave-openings to be looked into, and if I wouldn't do them for him, he would have to make another effort to get there himself. He tried to make out he was conferring a very great favour on me by offering to take a report solely from my untrained observation, but I flatly refused to look at it in that light. I was pretty tired also; I was soaked with perspiration from the heat; my head ached from the violence of the sun; and my hands were cut raw with the rope.

Coppinger might be tired, but he was still enthusiastic. He tried to make me enthusiastic also. "Look here," he said, "there's no knowing what you may find up there, and if you do lay hands on anything, remember it's your own. I shall have no claim whatever."

"Very kind of you, but I've got no use for any more mummies done up in goatskin bags."

"Bah! That's not a burial cave up there. Don't you know the difference yet in the openings? Now, be a good fellow. It doesn't follow that because we have drawn all the rest blank, you won't stumble across a good find for yourself up there."

"Oh, very well," I said, as he seemed so set on it; and away I stumbled over the fallen rocks, and along the ledge, and then scrambled up by that fissure in the cliff which saved us the two-mile round which we had had to take at first. I wrenched out the crowbar, and jammed it down in a new place, and then away I went over the side, with hands smarting worse at every new grip of the rope. It was an awkward job swinging into the cave mouth because the rock above overhung, or else (what came to the same thing) it had broken away below; but I managed it somehow, alt-

hough I landed with an awkward thump on my back, and at the same time I didn't let go the rope. It wouldn't do to have lost the rope then: Coppinger couldn't have flicked it into me from where he was below.

Now from the first glance I could see that this cave was of different structure to the others. They were for the most part mere dens, rounded out anyhow; this had been faced up with cutting tools, so that all the angles were clean, and the sides smooth and flat. The walls inclined inwards to the roof, reminding me of an architecture I had seen before but could not recollect where, and moreover there were several rooms connected up with passages. I was pleased to find that the other cave-openings which Coppinger wanted me to explore were merely the windows or the doorways of two of these other rooms.

Of inscriptions or markings on the walls there was not a trace, though I looked carefully, and except for bats the place was entirely bare. I lit a cigarette and smoked it through—Coppinger always thinks one is slurring over work if it is got through too quickly—and then I went to the entrance where the rope was, and leaned out, and shouted down my news.

He turned up a very anxious face. "Have you searched it thoroughly?" he bawled back.

"Of course I have. What do you think I've been doing all this time?"

"No, don't come down yet. Wait a minute. I say, old man, do wait a minute. I'm making fast the kodak and the flashlight apparatus on the end of the rope. Pull them up, and just make me half a dozen exposures, there's a good fellow."

"Oh, all right," I said, and hauled the things up, and got them inside. The photographs would be absolutely dull and uninterest-

ing, but that wouldn't matter to Coppinger. He rather preferred them that way. One has to be careful about halation in photographing these dark interiors, but there was a sort of ledge like a seat by the side of each doorway, and so I lodged the camera on that to get a steady stand, and snapped off the flashlight from behind and above.

I got pictures of four of the chambers this way, and then came to one where the ledge was higher and wider. I put down the camera, wedged it level with scraps of stone, and then sat down myself to recharge the flashlight machine. But the moment my weight got on that ledge, there was a sharp crackle, and down I went half a dozen inches[2].

Of course I was up again pretty sharply, and snapped up the kodak just as it was going to slide off to the ground. I will confess, too, I was feeling pleased. Here at any rate was a Guanche cupboard of sorts, and as they had taken the trouble to hermetically seal it with cement, the odds were that it had something inside worth hiding. At first there was nothing to be seen but a lot of dust and rubble, so I lit a bit of candle and cleared this away. Presently, however, I began to find that I was shelling out something that was not cement. It chipped away, in regular layers, and when I took it to the daylight I found that each layer was made up of two parts. One side was shiny staff that looked like talc, and on this was smeared a coating of dark toffee- coloured material, that might have been wax. The toffee-coloured surface was worked over with some kind of pattern.

Now I do not profess to any knowledge on these matters, and as a consequence took what Coppinger had told me about Guanche habits and acquirements as more or less true. For instance, he had repeatedly impressed upon me that this old people could not write, and having this in my memory, I did not guess

that the patterns scribed through the wax were letters in some obsolete character, which, if left to myself, probably I should have done. But still at the same time I came to the conclusion that the stuff was worth looting, and so set to work quarrying it out with the heel of my boot and a pocket-knife.

The sheets were all more or less stuck together, and so I did not go in for separating them farther. They fitted exactly to the cavity in which they were stored, but by smashing down its front I was able to get at the foot of them, and then I hacked away through the bottom layers with the knife till I got the bulk out in one solid piece. It measured some twenty inches by fifteen, by fifteen, but it was not so heavy as it looked, and when I had taken the remaining photographs, I lowered it down to Coppinger on the end of the rope.

There was nothing more to do in the caves then, so I went down myself next. The lump of sheets was on the ground, and Coppinger was on all fours beside it. He was pretty nearly mad with excitement.

"What is it?" I asked him.

"I don't know yet. But it is the most valuable find ever made in the Canary Islands, and it's yours, you unappreciative beggar; at least what there is left of it. Oh, man, man, you've smashed up the beginning, and you've smashed up the end of some history that is probably priceless. It's my own fault. I ought to have known better than set an untrained man to do important exploring work."

"I should say it's your fault if anything's gone wrong. You said there was no such thing as writing known to these ancient Canarios, and I took your word for it. For anything I knew the stuff might have been something to eat."

"It isn't Guanche work at all," said he testily. "You ought to have known that from the talc. Great heavens, man, have you no eyes? Haven't you seen the general formation of the island? Don't you know there's no talc here?"

"I'm no geologist. Is this imported literature then?"

"Of course. It's Egyptian: that's obvious at a glance. Though how it's got here I can't tell yet. It isn't stuff you can read off like a newspaper. The character's a variant on any of those that have been discovered so far. And as for this waxy stuff spread over the talc, it's unique. It's some sort of a mineral, I think: perhaps asphalt. It doesn't scratch up like animal wax. I'll analyse that later. Why they once invented it, and then let such a splendid notion drop out of use, is just a marvel. I could stay gloating over this all day."

"Well," I said, "if it's all the same for you, I'd rather gloat over a meal. It's a good ten miles hard going to the fonda, and I'm as hungry as a hawk already. Look here, do you know it is four o'clock already? It takes longer than you think climbing down to each of these caves, and then getting up again for the next."

Coppinger spread his coat on the ground, and wrapped the lump of sheets with tender care, but would not allow it to be tied with a rope for fear of breaking more of the edges. He insisted on carrying it himself too, and did so for the larger part of the way to Santa Brigida, and it was only when he was within an ace of dropping himself with sheer tiredness that he condescended to let me take my turn. He was tolerably ungracious about it too. "I suppose you may as well carry the stuff," he snapped, "seeing that after all it's your own."

Personally, when we got to the fonda, I had as good a dinner as was procurable, and a bottle of that old Canary wine, and

turned into bed after a final pipe. Coppinger dined also, but I have reason to believe he did not sleep much. At any rate I found him still poring over the find next morning, and looking very heavy- eyed, but brimming with enthusiasm.

"Do you know," he said, "that you've blundered upon the most valuable historical manuscript that the modern world has ever yet seen? Of course, with your clumsy way of getting it out, you've done an infinity of damage. For instance, those top sheets you shelled away and spoiled, contained probably an absolutely unique account of the ancient civilisation of Yucatan."

"Where's that, anyway?"

"In the middle of the Gulf of Mexico. It's all ruins to-day, but once it was a very prosperous colony of the Atlanteans."

"Never heard of them. Oh yes, I have though. They were the people Herodotus wrote about, didn't he? But I thought they were mythical."

"They were very real, and so was Atlantis, the continent where they lived, which lay just north of the Canaries here."

"What's that crocodile sort of thing with wings drawn in the margin?"

"Some sort of beast that lived in those bygone days. The pages are full of them. That's a cave-tiger. And that's some sort of colossal bat. Thank goodness he had the sense to illustrate fully, the man who wrote this, or we should never have been able to reconstruct the tale, or at any rate we could not have understood half of it. Whole species have died out since this was written, just as a whole continent has been swept away and three civilisations quenched. The worst of it is, it was written by a highly-educated man who somewhat naturally writes a very bad fist. I've hammered at it all the night through, and have only managed to make

out a few sentences here and there"—he rubbed his hands appreciatively. "It will take me a year's hard work to translate this properly."

"Every man to his taste. I'm afraid my interest in the thing wouldn't last as long as that. But how did it get there? Did your ancient Egyptian come to Grand Canary for the good of his lungs, and write it because he felt dull up in that cave?"

"I made a mistake there. The author was not an Egyptian. It was the similarity of the inscribed character which misled me. The book was written by one Deucalion, who seems to have been a priest or general—or perhaps both—and he was an Atlantean. How it got there, I don't know yet. Probably that was told in the last few pages, which a certain vandal smashed up with his pocketknife, in getting them away from the place where they were stowed."

"That's right, abuse me. Deucalion you say? There was a Deucalion in the Greek mythology. He was one of the two who escaped from the Flood: their Noah, in fact."

"The swamping of the continent of Atlantis might very well correspond to the Flood."

"Is there a Pyrrha then? She was Deucalion's wife."

"I haven't come across her yet. But there's a Phorenice, who may be the same. She seems to have been the reigning Empress, as far as I can make out at present."

I looked with interest at illustrations in the margin. They were quite understandable, although the perspective was all wrong. "Weird beasts they seem to have had knocking about the country in those days. Whacking big size too, if one may judge. By Jove, that'll be a cave-tiger trying to puff down a mammoth. I shouldn't care to have lived in those days."

"Probably they had some way of fighting the creatures. However, that will show itself as I get along with the translation." He looked at his watch—"I suppose I ought to be ashamed of myself, but I haven't been to bed. Are you going out?"

"I shall drive back to Las Palmas. I promised a man to have a round at golf this afternoon."

"Very well, see you at dinner. I hope they've sent back my dress shirts from the wash. O, lord! I am sleepy."

I left him going up to bed, and went outside and ordered a carriage to take me down, and there I may say we parted for a considerable time. A cable was waiting for me in the hotel at Las Palmas to go home for business forthwith, and there was a Liverpool boat in the harbour which I just managed to catch as she was steaming out. It was a close thing, and the boatmen made a small fortune out of my hurry.

Now Coppinger was only an hotel acquaintance, and as I was up to the eyes in work when I got back to England, I'm afraid I didn't think very much more about him at the time. One doesn't with people one just meets casually abroad like that. And it must have been at least a year later that I saw by a paragraph in one of the papers, that he had given the lump of sheets to the British Museum, and that the estimated worth of them was ten thousand pounds at the lowest valuation.

Well, this was a bit of revelation, and as he had so repeatedly impressed on me that the things were mine by right of discovery, I wrote rather a pointed note to him mentioning that he seemed to have been making rather free with my property. Promptly came back a stilted letter beginning, "Doctor Coppinger regrets" and so on, and with it the English translation of the wax-upon-talc MSS. He "quite admitted" my claim, and "trusted that the

profits of publication would be a sufficient reimbursement for any damage received."

Now I had no idea that he would take me unpleasantly like this, and wrote back a pretty warm reply to that effect; but the only answer I got to this was through a firm of solicitors, who stated that all further communications with Dr. Coppinger must be made through them.

I will say here publicly that I regret the line he has taken over the matter; but as the affair has gone so far, I am disposed to follow out his proposition. Accordingly the old history is here printed; the credit (and the responsibility) of the translation rests with Dr. Coppinger; and whatever revenue accrues from readers, goes to the finder of the original talc-upon-wax sheets, myself.

If there is a further alteration in this arrangement, it will be announced publicly at a later date. But at present this appears to be most unlikely.

Chapter 1

My Recall

§

The public official reception was over. The sentence had been read, the name of Phorenice, the Empress, adored, and the new Viceroy installed with all that vast and ponderous ceremonial which had gained its pomp and majesty from the ages. Formally, I had delivered up the reins of my government; formally, Tatho had seated himself on the snake-throne, and had put over his neck the chain of gems which symbolised the supreme office; and then, whilst the drums and the trumpets made their proclamation of clamour, he had risen to his feet, for his first state progress round that gilded council chamber as Viceroy of the Province of Yucatan.

With folded arms and bended head, I followed him between the glittering lines of soldiers, and the brilliant throng of courtiers, and chiefs, and statesmen. The roof-beams quivered to the cries of "Long Live Tatho!" "Flourish the Empress!" which came forth as in duty bound, and the new ruler acknowledged the welcome with stately inclinations of the head. In turn he went to the three lesser thrones of the lesser governors—in the East, the North, and the South, and received homage from each as the ritual was; and I, the man whom his coming had deposed, followed with the prescribed meekness in his train.

It was a hard task, but we who hold the higher offices learn to carry before the people a passionless face. Once, twenty years before, these same fine obeisances had been made to me; now the Gods had seen fit to make fortune change. But as I walked bent and humbly on behind the heels of Tatho, though etiquette forbade noisy salutations to myself, it could not inhibit kindly glances, and these came from every soldier, every courtier, and every chief who stood there in that gilded hall, and they fell upon me very gratefully. It is not often the fallen meet such tender looks.

The form goes, handed down from immemorial custom, that on these great ceremonial days of changing a ruler, those of the people being present may bring forward petitions and requests; may make accusations against their retiring head with sure immunity from his vengeance; or may state their own private theories for the better government of the State in the future. I think it may be pardoned to my vanity if I record that not a voice was raised against me, or against any of the items of my twenty years of rule. Nor did any speak out for alterations in the future. Yes, even though we made the circuit for the three prescribed times, all present showed their approval in generous silence.

Then, one behind the other, the new Viceroy and the old, we marched with formal step over golden tiles of that council hall beneath the pyramid, and the great officers of state left their stations and joined in our train; and at the farther wall we came to the door of those private chambers which an hour ago had been mine own.

Ah, well! I had no home now in any of those wondrous cities of Yucatan, and I could not help feeling a bitterness, though in sooth I should have been thankful enough to return to the Continent of Atlantis with my head still in its proper station.

Tatho gave his formal summons of "Open ye to the Viceroy," which the ritual commands, and the slaves within sent the massive stone valves of the door gaping wide. Tatho entered, I at his heels; the others halted, sending valedictions from the threshold; and the valves of the door clanged on the lock behind us. We passed on to the chamber beyond, and then, when for the first time we were alone together, and the forced etiquette of courts was behind us, the new Viceroy turned with meekly folded arms, and bowed low before me.

"Deucalion," he said, "believe me that I have not sought this office. It was thrust upon me. Had I not accepted, my head would have paid forfeit, and another man—your enemy—would have been sent out as viceroy in your place. The Empress does not permit that her will shall ever be questioned."

"My friend," I made answer, "my brother in all but blood, there is no man living in all Atlantis or her territories to whom I had liefer hand over my government. For twenty years now have I ruled this country of Yucatan, and Mexico beyond, first under the old King, and then as minister to this new Empress. I know my colony like a book. I am intimate with all her wonderful cities, with their palaces, their pyramids, and their people. I have hunted the beasts and the savages in the forests. I have built roads, and made the rivers so that they will carry shipping. I have fostered the arts and crafts like a merchant; I have discoursed, three times each day, the cult of the Gods with mine own lips. Through evil years and through good have I ruled here, striving only for the prosperity of the land and the strengthening of Atlantis, and I have grown to love the peoples like a father. To you I bequeath them, Tatho, with tender supplications for their interests."

"It is not I that can carry on Deucalion's work with Deucalion's power, but rest content, my friend, that I shall do my humble best to follow exactly on in your footsteps. Believe me, I came out to this government with a thousand regrets, but I would have died sooner than take your place had I known how vigorously the supplanting would trouble you."

"We are alone here," I said, "away from the formalities of formal assemblies, and a man may give vent to his natural self without fear of tarnishing a ceremony. Your coming was something of the suddenest. Till an hour ago, when you demanded audience, I had thought to rule on longer; and even now I do not know for what cause I am deposed."

"The proclamation said: 'We relieve our well-beloved Deucalion of his present service, because we have great need of his powers at home in our kingdom of Atlantis.'"

"A mere formality."

Tatho looked uneasily round the hangings of the chamber, and drew me with him to its centre, and lowered his voice.

"I do not think so," he whispered. "I believe she has need of you. There are troublous times on hand, and Phorenice wants the ablest men in the kingdom ready to her call."

"You may speak openly," I said, "and without fear of eavesdroppers. We are in the heart of the pyramid here, built in every way by a man's length of solid stone. Myself, I oversaw the laying of every course. And besides, here in Yucatan, we have not the niceties of your old world diplomacy, and do not listen, because we count it shame to do so."

Tatho shrugged his shoulders. "I acted only according to mine education. At home, a loose tongue makes a loose head, and there are those whose trade it is to carry tales. Still, what I say is

this: The throne shakes, and Phorenice sees the need of sturdy props. So she has sent this proclamation."

"But why come to me? It is twenty years since I sailed to this colony, and from that day I have not returned to Atlantis once. I know little of the old country's politics. What small parcel of news drifts out to us across the ocean, reads with slender interest here. Yucatan is another world, my dear Tatho, as you in the course of your government will learn, with new interests, new people, new everything. To us here, Atlantis is only a figment, a shadow, far away across the waters. It is for this new world of Yucatan that I have striven through all these years."

"If Deucalion has small time to spare from his government for brooding over his fatherland, Atlantis, at least, has found leisure to admire the deeds of her brilliant son. Why, sir, over yonder at home, your name carries magic with it. When you and I were lads together, it was the custom in the colleges to teach that the men of the past were the greatest this world has ever seen; but to-day this teaching is changed. It is Deucalion who is held up as the model and example. Mothers name their sons Deucalion, as the most valuable birth-gift they can make. Deucalion is a household word. Indeed, there is only one name that is near to it in familiarity."

"You trouble me," I said, frowning. "I have tried to do my duty for its own sake, and for the country's sake, not for the pattings and fondlings of the vulgar. And besides, if there are names to be in every one's mouth, they should be the names of the Gods."

Tatho shrugged his shoulders. "The Gods? They occupy us very little these latter years. With our modern science, we have grown past the tether of the older Gods, and no new one has appeared. No, my Lord Deucalion, if it were merely the Gods who

were your competitors on men's lips, your name would be a thousand times the better known."

"Of mere human names," I said, "the name of this new Empress should come first in Atlantis, our lord the old King being now dead."

"She certainly would have it so," replied Tatho, and there was something in his tone which made me see that more was meant behind the words. I drew him to one of the marble seats, and bent myself familiarly towards him. "I am speaking," I said, "not to the new Viceroy of Yucatan, but to my old friend Tatho, a member of the Priests' Clan, like myself, with whom I worked side by side in a score of the smaller home governments, in hamlets, in villages, in smaller towns, in greater towns, as we gained experience in war and knowledge in the art of ruling people, and so tediously won our promotion. I am speaking in Tatho's private abode, that was mine own not two hours since, and I would have an answer with that plainness which we always then used to one another."

The new Viceroy sighed whimsically. "I almost forget how to speak in plain words now," he said. "We have grown so polished in these latter days, that mere bald truth would be hissed as indelicate. But for the memory of those early years, when we expended as much law and thought over the ownership of a hay-byre as we should now over the fate of a rebellious city, I will try and speak plain to you even now, Deucalion. Tell me, old friend, what is it?"

"What of this new Empress?"

He frowned. "I might have guessed your subject," he said.

"Then speak upon it. Tell me of all the changes that have been made. What has this Phorenice done to make her throne unstable in Atlantis?"

Tatho frowned still. "If I did not know you to be as honest as our Lord the Sun, your questions would carry mischief with them. Phorenice has a short way with those who are daring enough to discuss her policies for other purpose than politely to praise them."

"You can leave me ignorant if you wish," I said with a touch of chill. This Tatho seemed to be different from the Tatho I had known at home, Tatho my workmate, Tatho who had read with me in the College of Priests, who had run with me in many a furious charge, who had laboured with me so heavily that the peoples under us might prosper. But he was quick enough to see my change of tone.

"You force me back to my old self," he said with a half smile, "though it is hard enough to forget the caution one has learned during the last twenty years, even when speaking with you. Still, whatever may have happened to the rest of us, it is clear to see that you at least have not changed, and, old friend, I am ready to trust you with my life if you ask it. In fact, you do ask me that very thing when you tell me to speak all I know of Phorenice."

I nodded. This was more like the old times, when there was full confidence between us. "The Gods will it now that I return to Atlantis," I said, "and what happens after that the Gods alone know. But it would be of service to me if I could land on her shores with some knowledge of this Phorenice, for at present I am as ignorant concerning her as some savage from Europe or mid-Africa."

"What would you have me tell?"

"Tell all. I know only that she, a woman, reigns, whereby the ancient law of the land, a man should rule; that she is not even of the Priestly Clan from which the law says all rulers must be drawn; and that, from what you say, she has caused the throne to totter. The throne was as firm as the everlasting hills in the old King's day, Tatho."

"History has moved with pace since then, and Phorenice has spurred it. You know her origin?"

"I know only the exact little I have told you."

"She was a swineherd's daughter from the mountains, though this is never even whispered now, as she has declared herself to be a daughter of the Gods, with a miraculous birth and upbringing. As she has decreed it a sacrilege to question this parentage, and has ordered to be burnt all those that seem to recollect her more earthly origin, the fable passes current for truth. You see the faith I put in you, Deucalion, by telling you what you wish to learn."

"There has always been trust between us."

"I know; but this habit of suspicion is hard to cast off, even with you. However, let me put your good faith between me and the torture further. Zaemon, you remember, was governor of the swineherd's province, and Zaemon's wife saw Phorenice and took her away to adopt and bring up as her own. It is said that the swineherd and his woman objected; perhaps they did; anyway, I know they died; and Phorenice was taught the arts and graces, and brought up as a daughter of the Priestly Clan."

"But still she was an adopted daughter only," I objected.

"The omission of the 'adopted' was her will at an early age," said Tatho dryly, "and she learnt early to have her wishes carried into fact. It was notorious that before she had grown to fifteen

years she ruled not only the women of the household, but Zaemon also, and the province that was beyond Zaemon."

"Zaemon was learned," I said, "and a devout follower of the Gods, and searcher into the higher mysteries; but, as a ruler, he was always a flabby fellow."

"I do not say that opportunities have not come usefully in Phorenice's way, but she has genius as well. For her to have raised herself at all from what she was, was remarkable. Not one woman out of a thousand, placed as she was, would have grown to be aught higher than a mere wife of some sturdy countryman, who was sufficiently simple to care nothing for pedigree. But look at Phorenice: it was her whim to take exercise as a man-at-arms and practise with all the utensils of war; and then, before any one quite knows how or why it happened, a rebellion had broken out in the province, and here was she, a slip of a girl, leading Zaemon's troops."

"Zaemon, when I knew him, was a mere derision in the field."

"Hear me on. Phorenice put down the rebellion in masterly fashion, and gave the conquered a choice between sword and service. They fell into her ranks at once, and were faithful to her from that moment. I tell you, Deucalion, there is a marvellous fascination about the woman."

"Her present historian seems to have felt it."

"Of course I have. Every one who sees her comes under her spell. And frankly, I am in love with her also, and look upon my coming here as detestable exile. Every one near to Phorenice, high and low, loves her just the same, even though they know it may be her whim to send them to execution next minute."

Perhaps I let my scorn of this appear.

"You feel contempt for our weakness? You were always a strong man, Deucalion."

"At any rate you see me still unmarried. I have found no time to palter with the fripperies of women."

"Ah, but these colonists here are crude and unfascinating. Wait till you see the ladies of the court, my ascetic."

"It comes to my mind," I said dryly, "that I lived in Atlantis before I came out here, and at that time I used to see as much of court life as most men. Yet then, also, I felt no inducement to marry."

Tatho chuckled. "Atlantis has changed so that you would hardly know the country to-day. A new era has come over everything, especially over the other sex. Well do I remember the women of the old King's time, how monstrous uncomely they were, how little they knew how to walk or carry themselves, how painfully barbaric was their notion of dress. I dare swear that your ladies here in Yucatan are not so provincial to-day as ours were then. But you should see them now at home. They are delicious. And above all in charm is the Empress. Oh, Deucalion, you shall see Phorenice in all her glorious beauty and her magnificence one of these fine days soon, and believe me you will go down on your knees and repent."

"I may see, and (because you say so) I may alter my life's ways. The Gods make all things possible. But for the present I remain as I am, celibate, and not wishful to be otherwise; and so in the meantime I would hear the continuance of your history."

"It is one long story of success. She deposed Zaemon from his government in name as well as in fact, and the news was spread, and the Priestly Clan rose in its wrath. The two neighbouring governors were bidden join forces, take her captive, and bring her

for execution. Poor men! They tried to obey their orders; they attacked her surely enough, but in battle she could laugh at them. She killed both, and made some slaughter amongst their troops; and to those that remained alive and became her prisoners, she made her usual offer—the sword or service. Naturally they were not long over making their choice: to these common people one ruler is much the same as another: and so again her army was reinforced.

"Three times were bodies of soldiery sent against her, and three times was she victorious. The last was a final effort. Before, it had been customary to despise this adventuress who had sprung up so suddenly. But then the priests began to realise their peril; to see that the throne itself was in danger; and to know that if she were to be crushed, they would have to put forth their utmost. Every man who could carry arms was pressed into the service. Every known art of war was ordered to be put into employment. It was the largest army, and the best equipped army that Atlantis then had ever raised, and the Priestly Clan saw fit to put in supreme command their general, Tatho."

"You!" I cried.

"Even myself, Deucalion. And mark you, I fought my utmost. I was not her creature then; and when I set out (because they wanted to spur me to the uttermost) the High Council of the priests pointed out my prospects. The King we had known so long, was ailing and wearily old; he was so wrapped up in the study of the mysteries, and the joy of closely knowing them, that earthly matters had grown nauseous to him; and at any time he might decide to die. The Priestly Clan uses its own discretion in the election of a new king, but it takes note of popular sentiment; and a general who at the critical time could come home victorious from a great campaign, which moreover would release a har-

assed people from the constant application of arms, would be the idol of the moment. These things were pointed out to me solemnly and in the full council."

"What! They promised you the throne?"

"Even that. So you see I set out with a high stake before me. Phorenice I had never seen, and I swore to take her alive, and give her to be the sport of my soldiery. I had a fine confidence in my own strategy then, Deucalion. But the old Gods, in whom I trusted then, remained old, taught me no new thing. I drilled and exercised my army according to the forms you and I learnt together, old comrade, and in many a tough fight found to serve well; I armed them with the choicest weapons we knew of then, with sling and mace, with bow and spear, with axe and knife, with sword and the throwing fire; their bodies I covered with metal plates; even their bellies I cared for, with droves of cattle driven in the rear of the fighting troops.

"But when the encounter came, they might have been men of straw for all the harm they did. Out of her own brain Phorenice had made fire-tubes that cast a dart which would kill beyond two bowshots, and the fashion in which she handled her troops dazzled me. They threatened us on one flank, they harassed us on the other. It was not war as we had been accustomed to. It was a newer and more deadly game, and I had to watch my splendid army eaten away as waves eat a sandhill. Never once did I get a chance of forcing close action. These new tactics that had come from Phorenice's invention, were beyond my art to meet or understand. We were eight to her one, and our close-packed numbers only made us so much the more easy for slaughter. A panic came, and those who could fled. Myself, I had no wish to go back and earn the axe that waits for the unsuccessful general. I

tried to die there fighting where I stood. But death would not come. It was a fine melee, Deucalion, that last one."

"And so she took you?"

"I stood with three others back to back, with a ring of dead round us, and a ring of the enemy hemming us in. We taunted them to come on. But at hand-to-hand courtesies we had shown we could hold our own, and so they were calling for fire-tubes with which they could strike us down in safety from a distance. Then up came Phorenice. 'What is this to-do?' says she. 'We seek to kill Lord Tatho, who led against you,' say they. 'So that is Tatho?' says she. 'A fine figure of a man indeed, and a pretty fighter seemingly, after the old manner. Doubtless he is one who would acquire the newer method. See now Tatho,' says she, 'it is my custom to offer those I vanquish either the sword (which, believe me, was never nearer your neck than now) or service under my banner. Will you make a choice?'

"'Woman,' I said, 'fairest that ever I saw, finest general the world has ever borne, you tempt me sorely by your qualities, but there is a tradition in our Clan, that we should be true to the salt we eat. I am the King's man still, and so I can take no service from you.'

"'The King is dead,' says she. 'A runner has just brought the tidings, meaning them to have fallen into your hands. And I am the Empress.'

"'Who made you Empress?' I asked.

"'The same most capable hand that has given me this battle,' says she. 'It is a capable hand, as you have seen: it can be a kind hand also, as you may learn if you choose. With the King dead, Tatho is a masterless man now. Is Tatho in want of a mistress?'

"'Such a glorious mistress as you,' I said, 'Yes.' And from that moment, Deucalion, I have been her slave. Oh, you may frown; you may get up from this seat and walk away if you will. But I ask you this: keep back your worst judgment of me, old friend, till after you have seen Phorenice herself in the warm and lovely flesh. Then your own ears and your own senses will be my advocates, to win me back your old esteem."

Chapter 2

Back to Atlantis

§

The words of Tatho were no sleeping draught for me that night. I began to think that I had made somewhat a mistake in wrapping myself up so entirely in my government of Yucatan, and not contriving to keep more in touch with events that were passing at home in Atlantis. For many years past it had been easy to see that the mariner folk who did traffic across the seas spoke with restraint, and that only what news the Empress pleased was allowed to ooze out beyond her borders. But, as I say, I was fully occupied with my work in the colony, and had no curiosity to pull away a veil intentionally placed. Besides, it has always been against my principles to put to the torture men who had received orders for silence from their superiors, merely that they shall break these orders for my private convenience.

However, the iron discipline of our Priestly Clan left me no choice of procedure. As was customary, I had been deprived of my office at a moment's notice. From that time on, all papers and authority belonged to my successor, and, although by courtesy I might be permitted to remain as a guest in the pyramid that had so recently been mine, to see another sunrise, it was clearly enjoined that I must leave the territory then at the topmost of my speed and hasten to report in Atlantis.